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Guidance

Apprenticeships: initial assessment to recognise prior learning

Updated 1 November 2023

Applies to England

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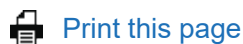
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This guidance provides additional information and support on recognising prior learning and experience. To simplify recognising prior learning for providers, it also:

- sets out a lighter-touch approach for young people who are less likely to have prior learning and experience
- includes information on the functionality we have introduced to the apprenticeship service to help you calculate price reductions

Over time, we will make recognising prior learning easier for providers by sharing information on how it typically applies. This will help to inform your own assessments.

Overview

Before the apprentice starts their apprenticeship, you must assess their prior learning and experience. This is to make sure that they are eligible to do the apprenticeship and it is the right programme for them. You can then tailor the training programme to meet the needs of the apprentice and employer.

Initial assessment costs, including prior learning assessment, are an eligible cost. This means you can include them within the funding for the apprenticeship.

Assessing the apprentice's prior learning and experience helps to establish their starting point. A robust initial assessment forms the foundation for a high-quality apprenticeship programme. It means the:

- apprentice will have a training plan that:
 - identifies their specific needs
 - does not duplicate knowledge and skills they already have
 - may help them to successfully complete their apprenticeship in a shorter time
- employer has a training programme for the apprentice that meets their needs and uses off-the-job training time effectively
- provider can offer a more tailored learning experience

The provider guide to delivering high-quality apprenticeships gives more detail about how [initial assessments](#) fit in to the rest of the apprenticeship.

Recognition of prior learning requirements for apprentices aged 16 to 18

Relevant prior learning or experience is unlikely to exist for apprentices aged 16 to 18, unless they have:

- previously started or completed an apprenticeship
- done other training aligned to an occupational standard, for example, a T-level
- been in post-16 employment relevant to their apprenticeship

You need to:

- check the apprentice's personal learning record (if it exists)
- have a discussion with the learner to check if they have any relevant prior learning or experience

If they do not have any relevant prior learning or experience, you do not need to take any further action. This means, you do not need to:

- complete a skills scan
- make any adjustments to their training or the price of the apprenticeship

Responsibilities in recognising prior learning and experience

Apprentices, employers, and providers all have a responsibility in making sure that they accurately recognise an apprentice's prior learning and experience.

Provider

You are responsible for assessing the apprentice's prior learning and experience. To do this, you should:

- determine the apprentice's prior learning and experience
- compare this to the requirements of the occupational competence in the apprenticeship standard

Using the assessment results, you can identify which parts of the training programme the apprentice no longer needs. You can then customise the apprentice's training plan.

You should:

- confirm the changes to the training plan with the apprentice and the employer
- record the findings in the evidence pack (as stated in the [apprenticeship funding rules](#))
- update the individualised learning record and apprenticeship service with changes to the programme

Employer

The employer needs to support the apprentice to make sure the assessment of prior learning and experience is right. If necessary, the provider should create a tailored training plan. This is especially important if the apprenticeship is [accelerated](#) (by 3 months or more). The employer should also ask the provider for details of their policy on prior learning and assessment.

The employer must agree the apprenticeship cost reduction based on the recognition of prior learning and experience. They would then negotiate the final price of the programme with the provider. This can be a virtual discussion, but both must record and sign the agreement.

Apprentice

The apprentice should reflect on their education and career and gather evidence. Their employer and provider will support them to prepare for the assessment of prior learning and experience.

The apprentice should understand that their prior learning and experience can help them complete their apprenticeship faster, or with unnecessary training removed.

Assessing prior learning and experience

You can design your prior learning assessment process to meet the needs of your programmes. It must include the stages outlined in the initial assessment section of the [apprenticeship funding rules](#). However, we do not dictate how to conduct these stages.

The assessment compares the apprentice's existing knowledge, skills and behaviours with those required in the standard to achieve occupational competence. The training plan should consider what the apprentice already knows and has done. Accounting for relevant prior learning and experience can reduce the content, duration and cost of the apprenticeship.

The assessment should also check if the apprentice meets the minimum requirements for off-the-job training and duration. The [apprenticeship funding rules](#) define these requirements. The apprenticeship will not be right for them if their prior learning and experience does not meet the minimum requirements. In that case, another type of training may be more appropriate.

Skills scan

The skills scan measures how well the apprentice meets the requirements for knowledge, skills, and behaviour described in the occupational standard. This may be a self-assessment, with a follow-up discussion. You should help the apprentice to give an accurate reflection of their skills.

Accreditation of prior qualifications

You must identify any previous qualifications or equivalents and unaccredited courses the apprentice has taken. Especially those that match the occupational standards.

To confirm the apprentice's knowledge, skills, and experience, talk to them and their employer. Make sure you document the discussion. This will also identify their career aspirations and explore the compatibility of the apprenticeship with their job role. The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education's (IfATE) [occupational maps](#) and [T Level progression profiles and mapping](#) (where appropriate) must inform this discussion.

Mapping the level of competence to the training programme

After completing the previous steps, you must match the apprentice's existing skills to the apprenticeship training programme. You should remove parts of the training programme that the apprentice does not need because they're already competent. You must agree the shorter training plan with less content and time with the apprentice and employer. Record the planned end date in the training plan.

Check the initial assessment again after the apprenticeship starts to check if the apprentice is working above or below expectations. Feedback from both the employer and apprentice is important. It can help identify if you need to adapt the training plan or consider an alternative standard.

Applying recognition of prior learning and experience

Individuals could begin an apprenticeship from a variety of entry points. This means they may have prior learning or experience you'll need to consider. For example:

- T Levels
- higher technical qualifications
- Skills Bootcamps
- further education qualifications

higher education qualifications

- work experience in the same or related job role

Some qualifications may align to occupational standards. This means there may be an overlap in knowledge, skills and behaviours. Effective recognition of prior learning and experience supports this progression and plays a key role in career development.

If an apprentice's previous training aligns with the proposed apprenticeship standard, you should assess the apprentice's competence. You need to decide if the apprentice is qualified for funding based on the minimum off-the-job training time and duration requirements.

If the previous qualification is a T Level, you need to consider IfATE's [progression profiles and mapping](#). These will help you to identify if:

- you should accelerate the proposed apprenticeship
- the apprenticeship is not suitable for funding due to insufficient remaining training

Mapping documents support the progression profiles. They explain the required extra learning for certain standards when moving from a T Level. Use these mapping documents to inform the prior learning assessment. You should reflect the results of these in the training plan if the apprentice is eligible for an apprenticeship.

An apprentice may have received training on many of the knowledge, skills, and behaviours from a previous programme but not to the level required to achieve occupational competence. This may be because the apprentice has not had the opportunity to learn them in depth or develop and embed their skills in the workplace. In these cases, you should carefully consider the training needed to achieve occupational competence as they could still be eligible for an apprenticeship. Record your justification in the training plan for audit purposes.

In the future, all Level 2 and 3 technical qualifications funded by DfE will align with occupational standards. This will mean they are more likely to overlap with apprenticeships.

Assessing knowledge, skills and behaviours against the standard

Assessing prior learning and experience involves comparing the apprentice's existing knowledge, skills, and behaviours with those needed to achieve the occupational standard. Use your expertise of the level of knowledge and skills needed to successfully complete the apprenticeship. Ask the employer's opinion on:

- the level of knowledge and skills needed to successfully complete the apprenticeship
- the level at which the apprentice is currently working at

Knowledge

The apprentice's knowledge is their current knowledge of technical detail and the expertise required to do their job. The apprentice's self-assessment and discussion can show if they have the necessary knowledge for a specific part of the occupational standard. Where an apprentice has some or 'emerging' knowledge, recognition of prior learning may still apply.

Skills

The apprentice's current skills refer to how competent they are at practically applying their knowledge to their role. During the discussion, it's important to talk about their duties and their experiences from previous work or training. You should also assess the level of competence with which an apprentice uses their skills. Refer to the assessment plan if needed.

Behaviours

During the discussion, you need to assess the apprentice's current mindset, attitude, and approach. The discussion should indicate their current competence, particularly when discussing their work experience.

Recording prior learning and experience in the training plan

The [apprenticeship funding rules](#) set out the evidence requirements for recognising prior learning in the training plan and documenting the outcome of the initial assessment. You must show you conducted a robust assessment and used that information to develop a personalised training programme. Where they have recognised prior learning and experience, you must show evidence of reducing content, duration, and price using the formula.

If you have not made an adjustment for prior learning or experience, record the reasons in the evidence pack. Include references to:

- the outcomes of the skills scan
- accreditation of prior qualifications and training
- your discussion with the apprentice and employer

There may be circumstances where the apprentice may not need all the content of the training programme, but it is impractical to reduce the overall duration of the apprenticeship. For example, because the apprentice is learning alongside other apprentices who still need that off-the-job training content. If you do not reduce the overall duration, the programme must still meet the minimum:

- requirements of the off-the-job-training policy (for the full apprenticeship programme's duration)

- duration of the funded apprenticeship

If the employer and apprentice agree that they should not attend the unfunded elements of the programme, the apprentice must remain involved in active learning. This is a requirement of the funding rules.

Reducing the price of the apprenticeship

You must reduce the price of the apprenticeship in proportion to the training elements that the apprentice does not need. You need to agree this price with the employer and document it in the evidence pack.

Calculate the apprentice's prior learning or experience as a percentage of the total off-the-job hours for the standard.

Once you've identified the number of hours the apprentice does not need, apply a reduction in cost to reflect the hours you have removed from the training plan. To reflect the training delivery costs of the hours, you must reduce the price by a minimum of 50% of the prior learning percentage.

Example: reducing the price of the apprenticeship when you've identified prior learning

Details of apprentice A's apprenticeship

Total off-the-job training hours for the standard	1,000
Reduction in off-the-job training hours due to prior learning or experience	300
Maximum funding band for the standard	£10,000

1. Calculate apprentice A's prior learning or experience as a percentage of the total off-the-job training hours for the apprenticeship standard.

$$300 \div 1000 = 0.3$$

$$0.3 \times 100 = 30\%$$

2. Half this, to get the starting point for the price reduction.

$$30\% \div 2 = 15\%$$

3. Work out what 15% of funding band maximum is.

15% of £10,000 = £1,500

4. Deduct this figure from the maximum funding band.

£10,000 - £1,500 = £8,500

£8,500 is the maximum funding you can receive from an apprenticeship service account for apprentice A. You can negotiate the price down further to reflect factors affecting price, such as discounts for large cohorts.

Example: reducing the price of the apprenticeship using decimal points

It's likely that you'll need to work with decimal figures when calculating price reductions.

Details of apprentice B's apprenticeship

Total off-the-job training hours for the standard	1,600
Reduction in off-the-job training hours due to prior learning or experience	90
Maximum funding band for the standard	£10,050

1. Calculate apprentice B's prior learning or experience as a percentage of the total off-the-job training hours for the apprenticeship standard.

$90 \div 1,600 = 0.05625$

$0.05625 \times 100 = 5.625\%$

2. Half this, to get the starting point for the price reduction.

$5.625\% \div 2 = 2.8125\%$

3. At this point, you must round the figure to 2 decimal places. You should never round any numbers before this point. Round decimal numbers from 5 and above up, and from 4 and below down.

Round 2.8125% to 2.81% (if the figure is 2.817%, you would round it to 2.82%)

4. Work out what 2.81% of the funding band maximum is.

$2.81\% \text{ of } £10,050 = £282.405$

5. If this figure has any decimal points, round it to full pounds following the same principles as step 3. This will give you the minimum price reduction due to prior learning or experience.

Round £282.405 to £282

6. Deduct this figure from the funding band maximum.

$£10,050 - £282 = £9,768$

£9,768 is the maximum funding you can receive from an apprenticeship service account for apprentice B. You can negotiate the price down further to reflect factors affecting price, such as discounts for large cohorts.

Recording recognition of prior learning on the apprenticeship service

We have introduced functionality in the apprenticeship service to help you calculate price reductions due to recognition of prior learning.

We currently capture the reduction in:

- weeks for training due to prior learning
- price for training due to prior learning, in whole pounds

From the end of November, when [adding an apprentice](#), you'll see 3 extra fields to capture recognised prior learning details. These fields will initially be optional when [adding a bulk upload file](#), but will become mandatory.

We'll capture:

- the total off-the-job training time for the apprenticeship standard before any reductions, in whole hours
- the reduction in off-the-job training time due to recognition of prior learning, in whole hours
- whether or not you have reduced the duration of the apprentice due to recognition of prior learning

We'll use these fields to check the price reduction you have entered. If we suspect an error, we'll ask you to review your calculation. If we think you've made an error, the service will show you the correct price reduction and ask you to check it. This calculation will use your figures and the funding rules.

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